



# *Assistant Commandant's Perspective*



by RDML C. E. BONE  
*Assistant Commandant for Prevention*

To serve the public and protect the U.S. Maritime Transportation System from accidents or intentional sabotage, the U.S. Coast Guard is determined to prevent marine casualties and strengthen the ability to prepare, protect, and respond to a wide variety of marine incidents involving vessels as well as marine facilities both onshore and offshore.

We all share common goals of safe, environmentally sound, and secure use of our ports and waterways. Ships and their systems are built to meet comprehensive standards of safety and pollution prevention, and undergo considerable oversight during construction by interested parties and governmental authorities. Waterways have rules of operation, controls, and restrictions to limit the risks. Likewise mariners are trained, tested, and licensed to operate within the scope of their abilities. Yet maritime accidents, more commonly referred to as marine casualties, continue to occur throughout U.S. and international waterways every day. The term "marine casualty" for vessels and the mariners who operate them, includes any event or any occurrence involving a vessel that results in damage by or to the vessel, its apparel, gear, or cargo, or injury or loss of life of any person. This includes, among other things, collisions, strandings, groundings, foundering, heavy weather damage, fires, explosions, failure of gear and equipment, and any other damage that might affect or impair the seaworthiness of the vessel.

The U.S. Coast Guard investigates marine casualties to promote maritime safety and security and to protect the marine environment. Similar to other transportation sectors such as air, rail, or highway, there is a constant need to assess the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the probability of risk. We identify hazard initiators and risk reduction options, as well as methods of reducing and evaluating the consequences of risk. Ultimately the goal of the U.S. Coast Guard is to protect the public through prevention of future incidents by revealing the linkage of compounding factors that causes an accident or casualty.

The ability to prevent marine casualties has been developed through over a century of case experience and with decades of extensive coordination with partner organizations such as the International Maritime Organization, the National Transportation Safety Board, and the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. The effort to prevent marine casualties is coordinated through a breadth of industry organizations; national, regional, and local committees; and state partners. The U.S. Coast Guard has developed extensive experience with risk assessment for marine casualties. As part of its mission to prevent and mitigate marine accidents, the U.S. Coast Guard investigates the causes of marine casualties and analyzes investigation data in an effort to identify measures that will improve marine safety. It is estimated that 80 percent of marine casualties have human error or human factor-related causes. Therefore, particular attention is made to analyze the entire chain of events, operating environment, and decisions made to include operations, maintenance, management, and governmental oversight that led up to the casualty. We must remain rigorous, open, and deliberate in our investigative process, engaging the breadth of governmental and private sector expertise if we are to be successful in identifying the causal factors and preventing future marine casualty events.

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